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California Facing Largest Power Outages In Its History This Week Amid Record Heatwave

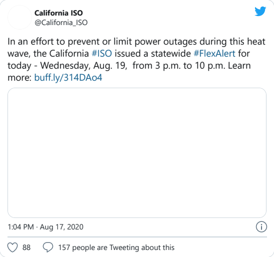
Tom Tapp
August 17, 2020 2:32pm

93
COMMENTS

Downtown Los Angeles skyline,
Kirby Lee via AP Images

As California struggles to rebound from the coronavirus pandemic, wilting heat and wildfires, it's facing another dangerous crisis: blackouts.

As temperatures broke records across the state, California energy officials announced the first rolling blackouts in the state since 2001 and warned that the state was bracing for what could be the largest power outage it has ever seen, likely on Monday.



California ISO
@California_ISO

In an effort to prevent or limit power outages during this heat wave, the California #ISO issued a statewide #FlexAlert for today - Wednesday, Aug. 19, from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. Learn more: buff.ly/314DAo4

1:04 PM · Aug 17, 2020

88 · 157 people are Tweeting about this

When asked about the number of Californians who will be impacted and how it ranks historically, the President/CEO of the Independent Service Operator — the nonprofit that operates the state's power grid — said he wasn't entirely sure.

"I can't speak to historical comparisons," Steve Berberich said. "I wasn't here during the energy crisis."

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When pressed by a reporter who had run the numbers and estimated that 3.3 million Californians will be impacted, Berberich assented that his calculations were "probably fairly accurate."

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The *San Jose Mercury News* estimates power outages impacted 1.5 million people in 2001. Given that number, 3.3 million people without power would be at least twice as large.

ISO officials said they were shutting down power to residents to prevent events of an even greater magnitude.

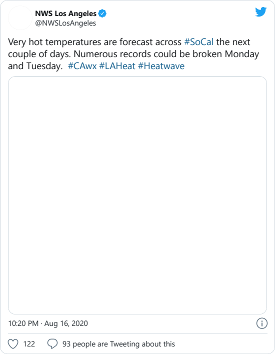
"We avoid demand exceeding supply to ensure there's not a widespread system collapse," said ISO Market Policy and Performance VP Mark Rothleder.

On Monday, officials said they expect blackouts to begin about 4 p.m. and extend through at least 10 p.m. in two-hour blocks for each affected area.

A big problem is a shortage of power that could be imported from utilities in neighboring states. California has been able to bridge the gaps in previous heatwaves because it could bring in power. This time, though, “we are facing diminished imports because the West is heating up,” said Berberich.

Gov. Gavin Newsom said the state was using “all the tools in the tool kit” to meet demand. “We are likely to fall short,” he said, as oppressive temperatures stress the state’s energy system that serves 5 million households and businesses.

The National Weather Service warned of potentially record-breaking heat in the L.A. area on Monday and Tuesday.



NWS Los Angeles
@NWSLosAngeles

Very hot temperatures are forecast across #SoCal the next couple of days. Numerous records could be broken Monday and Tuesday. #CAwx #LAHeat #Heatwave

10:20 PM · Aug 16, 2020

♡ 122 93 people are Tweeting about this

Newsom noted that temperatures in Death Valley reached 130 degrees Sunday, a peak not hit since at least a century-plus, according to the National Weather Service. As a point of reference, the hottest temperature ever officially recorded on Earth was 134 degrees, also in Death Valley, in 1913. And that mark has been disputed for decades.

Newsom added that “rather extraordinary weather conditions” also have put firefighters under enormous pressure as they battle wildfires across the state.

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Newsom pointed to California's shift to renewable resources as part of the reason for the supply shortage. Shutting down polluting gas power plants has created gaps in the state's energy supply, he said.

While the state remains committed to a greener future, Newsom said, "We cannot sacrifice reliability" and promised that officials would be "much more aggressive … in making sure that is the case."

Big power users are being allowed to shift to backup sources and stored energy that is typically restricted as state officials work to urgently deploy more resources systemwide, according to the governor.

A statewide Flex Alert calling for residents to voluntarily conserve electricity remains in effect through Wednesday. Officials also are urging businesses statewide to restrict their usage. In some cases, the state is asking business owners to support outreach to their customers about conserving energy. Newsom named Telsa, a major manufacturer of electric vehicles, as one of the businesses working closely with the state.

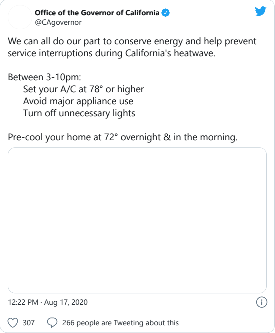
The California ISO issued the Flex Alert on Sunday, saying there is insufficient energy to meet high consumer demand during the record-breaking heatwave. To minimize the need for controlled outages, residents were asked to use air conditioning early in the day and set thermostats at 78 in the afternoon and evening hours, while avoiding the use of major appliances between the hours of 3 p.m. and 10 p.m.

The alert followed blackouts Friday and Saturday that Newsom said came without warning.

The governor on Sunday convened an all-hands meeting with California Independent System Operator (CAISO), the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), the California Energy Commission (CEC), the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and senior administration officials and called the weekend service disruptions "unacceptable."

Newsom announced Monday that he had signed an emergency proclamation to free up energy capacity.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power said Friday's rolling blackouts did not affect residents of the city. "We own our own power plants and transmission lines and had enough supply to meet demand + req'd reserve," the department tweeted. "We encourage our customers to conserve to help state grid and reduce strain on system."



Office of the Governor of California
@CAgovernor

We can all do our part to conserve energy and help prevent service interruptions during California's heatwave.

Between 3-10pm:
Set your A/C at 78° or higher
Avoid major appliance use
Turn off unnecessary lights

Pre-cool your home at 72° overnight & in the morning.

12:22 PM · Aug 17, 2020

♡ 307 266 people are Tweeting about this

On Saturday, high temperatures increased electricity demand while one power plant was down and wind power fell short, prompting a Stage 3 Electrical Emergency that lasted 20 minutes. It was called at 6:28 p.m., making rolling outages imminent or in progress, according to the California ISO.

No major outages were reported Monday by Southern California Edison, but peak power demand likely would trigger outages later in the day.

In a letter, the governor said the blackouts were called Friday and Saturday without notice and demanded an investigation.

“Residents, communities and other governmental organizations did not receive sufficient warning that these de-energizations could occur. Collectively, energy regulators failed to anticipate this event and to take necessary actions to ensure reliable power to Californians,” Newsom wrote.

“This cannot stand,” said Newsom at his midday press conference. “California residents and businesses deserve better from their government.”

Berberich said the ISO did a poor job of warning residents, utilities “and particularly the governor’s office” last weekend that blackouts were imminent.

“We own that, and we’re sorry,” he said.

Power providers say a lack of supply from sources outside the state contributed to the shortage, as other Western states struggled to meet their own demand during the heatwave.

During his midday Monday news conference, the governor promised the investigation would be swift and comprehensive.

The stakes are high for Newsom, who two weeks ago faced a failure of the state's coronavirus data system; the 2001 blackouts were widely seen to have contributed to then-governor Gray Davis's political demise. He was recalled by voters in 2003.

City News Service contributed to this report.

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Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:07 pm* REPLY

Go GREEN lol, you haent increased water supplies or power since well the 60s or 70s. hey you feel good and warm loving your global footprint. enjoy it because i am as a ex kalifornian, rot baby.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 5:21 pm* REPLY

But we increased population.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:23 pm* REPLY

Yep, I left years ago and have never looked back.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:05 pm* REPLY

Sure, civilization in California seems to be breaking down, but how is the Delta smelt?

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:04 pm* REPLY

So crazy. Almost as if some force is deliberately trying to create chaos!…

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:30 pm* REPLY

That force is Blue.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:19 pm* REPLY

Socialism and the New Green Deal.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:02 pm* REPLY

When political correctness trumps sound and rational policy, science and management. Pun intended,

---

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 3:59 pm* REPLY

How's this for staying on topic? https://recallgavin2020.com

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:29 pm* REPLY

Hurry up.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 3:59 pm* REPLY

yeah. let's shut down more power plants while we're at it.

Workedtheworld *on August 17, 2020 5:10 pm* REPLY

Yes, the smoke from the fires is getting thick. Shut down more of the evil, polluting power plants. Maybe California can green itself into comfort.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 3:58 pm* REPLY

Good. Shut the power off. Shut the water off and seal the borders.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 3:52 pm* REPLY

Are Newsom and Garcetti trying to prove they are even more incompetent than Cuomo and de Blasio?

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 5:21 pm* REPLY

if so– they are succeeding.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 3:44 pm* REPLY

This is the kind of thing that one sees in less developed nations. PGE has been a disaster for Californians.

There needs to be a massive investment in a new power grid across the country. Utilities that can't provide good service should be replaced by ones that can adapt. Moving to state owned power services may be the best option for some states.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:58 pm* REPLY

Yea, because government is so good at and capable of doing stuff. It's government regulation and interference that caused this mess.

JM *on August 17, 2020 5:28 pm* REPLY

Like big electric is so good. Their lousy maintenance caused a huge wildfire last year. It nearly went banktrumped. This the result of 40 years of unbridled capitalism which started with a Californian named Reagan.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:42 pm* REPLY

Yeah, the state will do a better job! You truly can't fix stupid.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 3:31 pm* REPLY

Elections have consequences. Just don't make the same mistake when you finally move to better run states.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:28 pm* REPLY

You can bet they'll take their screwed-up politics with them.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 3:30 pm* REPLY

Another disaster on Trump watch. Vote Biden.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 5:18 pm* REPLY

Dems continue to destroy the country and point at Trump. It's not working libs. Keep killing each other and burning your cities down.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 5:07 pm* REPLY

Are you kidding? This is about Democrats. They run California. The federal government and Trump have nothing to do with this. You must live in CA.

Chance Mac *on August 17, 2020 4:46 pm* REPLY

..this is a Dem action you nut bag…

Bert *on August 17, 2020 4:37 pm* REPLY

pathetic comment…another disaster on Gruesome Newsom Democrat watch, doing what they do best: running California into the ground, as usual

---

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:34 pm* REPLY

So Californians blame Trump for their state's ineptitude. Classic.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:23 pm* REPLY

You think Biden is the answer? You think Trump is responsible for this? You really are stupid!

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:16 pm* REPLY

If your mom finds out your posting from the basement again, you'll be grounded!

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:16 pm* REPLY

Sorry, but California…a state of amazing beauty & resources…has been run by liberal politicians for at least 20 years & Trump has not stepped foot into it. When voting always remember, "be careful what you wish for, you may get it"
California is now proof of that old saw.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:15 pm* REPLY

LOL right…Trump messed up California… that's obvious.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:09 pm* REPLY

LOL..

Since when does **anyone** in CA politics listen to, or do ANYTHING Trump says?

Time for nap kiddo..

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:03 pm* REPLY

Sure, sally.

Terry Hartman *on August 17, 2020 4:03 pm* REPLY

WHO RUNS CALAFORNIA…….

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:30 pm* REPLY

Incompetent Communists.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:14 pm* REPLY

An idiot named Gavin Newsom

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 3:22 pm* REPLY

HELL FUCKEN NOOOOOOOOO !!!!!!?!

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 2:52 pm* REPLY

Will Governor Gabby be making someone resign so he can make another “the buck stops here” speech?

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 2:52 pm* REPLY

Newsom needs to be recalled.

Anonymous *on August 17, 2020 4:13 pm* REPLY

YES

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